

Sorting Gate

Moving the needle.

by Kelli Retallick-Riley, Angus Genetics Inc.



In business, the phrase “moving the needle” means creating a noticeable positive change. Profits are up;

customer retention is increasing; more new products are being developed. Whatever the metric, seeing the change helps managers know they are headed in the right direction.

More often than not, that needle pegged in the positive part of the dial isn’t the result of just one action. It’s a series of decisions resulting in many efforts that help show a positive result.

The same is true for you, the cattleman. The good news is there are three significant areas that, if

managed collectively, can help you move your genetic needle.

1. Define your breeding objective

Defining a breeding objective, or breeding goal, is one of the most important components to making genetic progress. Making a plan, being consistent in following that plan, and tracking the results may be the most important things an operator can do to make genetic change.

Then, what is the plan? Are you going to sell feeder calves through the sale barn, or are you planning to retain ownership? What about the females? Will you keep them as replacements?

Think about your long-term goals, when you want to market

them and what works in your environment.

Once you set your breeding objective, it’s important to stay true to it. It can be easy to get distracted by what’s popular at the moment. Staying on track will help keep you focused on results.

2. Invest in the right genetics

A bull purchase is a large investment that will have a lasting influence. Powering your herd with registered Angus bulls means you have a large variety of tools available to help you make informed decisions — expected progeny differences (EPDs), dollar value indexes (\$Values), adjusted weights and ultrasound measures, pedigrees and more.

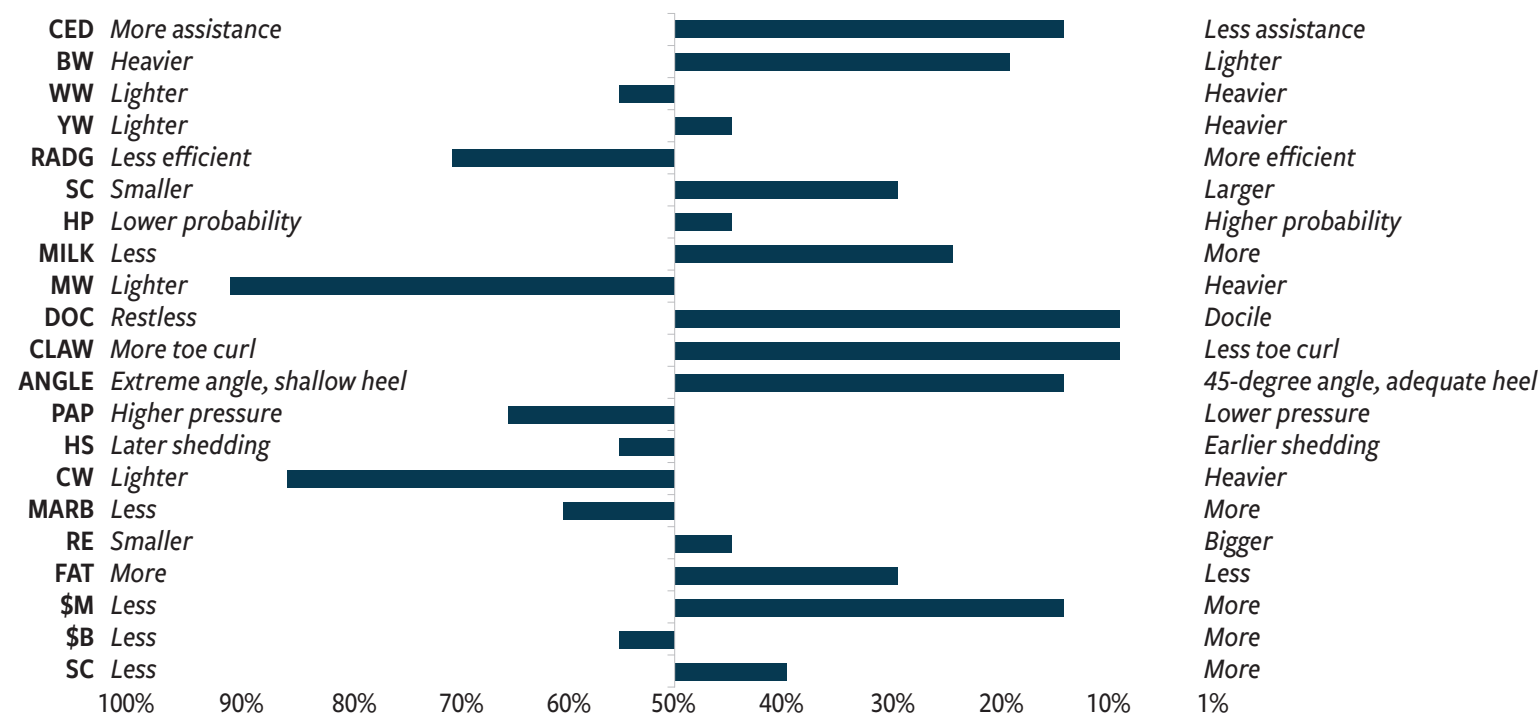
Alongside sound visual appraisal, with your breeding objective in hand, it is much easier to use the tools to target different traits. Fig. 1 shows available EPDs to date and how to interpret those values based on an animal’s rank in the population.

Yet, it is more than knowing what each trait acronym stands for. These tools must be applied correctly. Remember the “E” in EPD stands for “expected.” An EPD is the expected difference in future progeny performance compared to the performance of the progeny of other sires. It gives an indication of how an individual will perform at siring the next generation.

To get the full value of these tools, you must compare two bulls

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Fig. 1: Interpreting EPD values based on an animal’s rank in the population



CED = Calving ease direct; BW = birth weight; WW = weaning weight; YW = yearling weight; RADG = residual average daily gain; SC = scrotal circumference; HP = heifer pregnancy; MILK = maternal milk; MW = mature weight; DOC = docility; Claw = claw set; Angle = foot angle; PAP = pulmonary arterial pressure; HS = hair shedding; CW = carcass weight; MARB = Marbling; RE = ribeye area; FAT = fat thickness; \$M = maternal weaned calf value; \$B = beef value; \$C = combined value. Visit <https://www.angus.org/Nce/Definitions> for more information.

against one another, or compare an individual bull to breed average. Using comparisons within the herd and knowledge of the current bull battery can help individuals make directional change in the given trait of interest.

3. Select the right replacements

Often, even if people have a breeding objective and have focused on selecting the right bulls for their operation, they overlook the third, and just as important, area of focus: keeping back the right heifers. As with bull selection, choosing the right replacements starts with form and function. From size to feet and leg structure, body condition or performance, decide which heifers make the cut on your farm.

After that, what helps you make the decision? Do you find that you lean toward the older animals

because they are bigger or you've heard they breed back better? Do you have a rule that only the first half of the heifers could make the replacement pen?

What if you had more data to help you choose replacements and sooner? GeneMax[®] Advantage[™] is a genomic test for commercial heifers that allows producers to get genetic scores for traits that drive profitability in the beef industry. The simple test can utilize blood, hair or tissue.

The test provides 17 individual trait scores, including claw set and foot angle composite score, which is the first of its kind for any commercial heifer test. With that, previous smart outliers, including docility, cow cost and tenderness, have upgraded to their own individual score. Finally, a new feed-to-gain index has been added that combines feed intake and postweaning gain into an easy-to-

use number to rank heifers for feed efficiency.

Producers can also take advantage of the three economic indexes that highlight animals predicted to be the most profitable for different segments of the industry. Cow Advantage describes profitability from conception to weaning. Feeder Advantage describes the terminal traits, combining feedlot efficiency with carcass quality, to find those animals that will target the Certified Angus Beef[®] (CAB[®]) brand when hung on the rail. Finally, Total Advantage works to put the supply chain profitability all together. This index combines both the maternal and terminal traits in one individual value.

Perhaps the most helpful part of GeneMax is how it aligns with the indexes available on registered Angus bulls, meaning strong relationships between Cow

Advantage and maternal weaned calf value (\$M), Feeder Advantage and beef value (\$B), and Total Advantage and combined value (\$C). This allows commercial cattlemen to use the information in bull-buying decisions, as well as in selecting replacement females.

If you find yourself longing to increase your herd's Feeder Advantage score, because of the relationship between it and \$B, selecting a herd bull with a high \$B will increase your herd's Feeder Advantage score. The \$28-per-head test comes with free sire verification, allowing all the benefits of sire identification and genetic prediction with one test.

With the right focus, moving the needle quickly can happen for your commercial herd. Stay focused on your breeding objective, and then use the tools available to select the right Angus bulls and replacement heifers. **ABB**



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